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AUTHOR Reck, Una Mae Lange; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To examine effects of ethnicity, SES, and residence on students' participation in formal clubs, activities, and sports, a survey was administered to 1,450 students at a county-wide consolidated high school in southern Appalachia. The purpose was to investigate the significance of Appalachian ethnicity as an explanation for behavior and to understand factors influencing internal social structure in high schools. The survey included three general sections. The first elicited background information to establish students' family ties to Appalachia, SES, and residence; the second elicited information concerning past and present participation in high school clubs, etc.; the third asked questions about employment, after-school work at home, and transportation. Participation in various activities was then compared separately with SES, residence, and ethnicity. All of the variables of SES, residence, and Appalachian ethnicity showed significant relationships to the level of participation and the type of participation. Students who were Appalachian, rural, and from the lower socioeconomic class participated in clubs, activities, and sports significantly less than did non-Appalachian students who resided in town and were from the middle or upper socioeconomic class. Residence and SES strongly mediated the influence of ethnicity; higher SES and town residence appeared to overcome the liabilities of being Appalachian. (CHG)

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The Effects of Ethnicity, Class and Residence on Student Participation in a Southern Appalachian High School

Una Mae Lange Reck
Assistant Dean and Associate Professor
College of Education
Appalachian State University

Gregory G. Reck
Professor of Anthropology
Appalachian State University

Susan E. Keefe
Associate Professor of Anthropology
Appalachian State University

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THE EFFECTS OF ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND RESIDENCE ON STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN A SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN HIGH SCHOOL

Dr. Una Mae Lange Reck, Dr. Gregory G. Reck and Dr. Susan E. Keefe

Appalachian State University

The objective of the research is to examine the effects of ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and residence on student participation in formal clubs, activities, and sports at a county wide consolidated high school in southern Appalachia. The reasons for examining these relationships are basically two. The first has to do with investigating the potential significance of Appalachian ethnicity as an explanation for behavior, in this case relating to the educational experience. The second is to try to understand the factors which influence the internal formal social structure of a high school. This latter objective has significance for understanding attitudes and decisions since it has been suggested by researchers that the internal social organization of schools is one significant factor effecting these attitudes and decisions.

A survey was administered to the 1450 high school students during homeroom period. Participation in the survey was voluntary and approximately 1000 usable surveys were completed. The survey consisted of two general sections. The first section elicited background information disigned to establish the generational depth of the student's family ties to Appalachia, the student's socioeconomic class, and residence in the county. The second section elicited information concerning the student's past and present participation in formal school clubs, sports, and activities.

The results of the analysis of the survey demonstrate that the factors of Appalachian ethnicity, SES, and residence all are related significantly to both the level of participation and the type of participation. Students who are Appalachians, those who are rural, and those from the lower socioeconomic class participate in clubs, activities, and sports to a significantly less degree than do students who are non-Appalachians, those who reside in the town, and those from the upper socioeconomic class. Moreover, the more "prestigious" clubs, activities, and sports have higher rates of participation from non-Appalachian, higher SES, and town students. Data indicate that the factors of SES and Appalachian ethnicity have a stronger relationship with participation than does residence.

The Effects of Ethnicity, Class, and Residence on Student Participation in a Southern Appalachian High School[1]

Objective

The objective of the research reported in this paper was to examine the effects of ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and residence on student participation in formal clubs, activities, and sports at a county wide consolidated high school in southern Appalachia. The reasons for examining these relationships are basically two. The first has to do with investigating the potential significance of Appalachian ethnicity as an explanation for behavior, in this case relating to the educational experience. There is still considerable disagreement over the concept of Appalachian ethnicity and culture in the literature on Appalachia. The second is to try to understand the factors which influence the internal formal social structure of a high school. This latter objective has significance for understanding attitudes and decisions since it has been suggested by researchers that the internal social organization of schools is one significant factor effecting these attitudes and decisions.

Theoretical Framework

Education in Appalachia has not been the subject of extensive research. Many social commentators, most of whom are native to Appalachia, have written about their own views on the weaknesses of education in Appalachia and their prescriptions for remedying the situation (Branscome 1972; Browning 1978; Clark 1974; Ikenberry 1970; Ogletree 1978; Miller 1977). These writers have dealt with many of the same issues that have been emphasized in research on

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ethnic minorities in the United States: issues of prejudice, alienation, stereotyping, and cultural misunderstanding and conflict. However, their observations are without extensive research data for support.

The few community studies that have been done in Appalachia have often included observations about education and schools (Beaver 1976; Foster 1977; Hicks 1976; Weller 1965; Stephenson 1968). However, these observations have been limited parts of more general studies rather than studies which focused on schools. Nevertheless, the observations in these studies have suggested that schools in Appalachia do have many of the same problems that face other schools serving more familiar ethnic groups. These conclusions often have been consistent with those reached by the social commentators mentioned above.

There is considerable evidence that schools in Appalachia are frequently "failures" as measured by such traditional educational norms as achievement levels, dropout rates, and the percentage of high school graduates going to college (Appalachian Consortium 1981; Caudill 1962; Graff 1962; Parker 1970; Schrag 1972). For example, Caudill (1962) notes that high school graduates in Harlan County, Kentucky, are almost three and one-half years behind the achievement of their counterparts in non-Appalachian counties of western Kentucky. Graff (1962) reports that 38% of rural eighth graders and 20% of rural twelfth graders in Appalachia have been held back one or more years. The Appalachian Regional Commission's Educational Advisory Committee found that in 1970 the Appalachian dropout rate averaged 65% compared to 36% nationally (Parker 1970). In some Appalachian school districts, the dropout rate is as high as 85% (Schrag 1972). Of the ten states in the nation with the lowest percentage of 16 and 17 year-olds in school, eight were Appalachian states (Parker 1970), and of the population 25 years of age and older, only 10% in Appalachia had finished college compared to 15% nationally

(Appalachian Consortium 1981). Yet, the reasons for all of these "failures" are poorly understood.

Part of the problem in understanding these "failures" has to do with the interaction of cultural and economic factors in Appalachia. Rural residence (over 50 percent of the population in Appalachia is rural) and low socio-economic status (the income level in Appalachia is 80% of the national average) compound with the factor of cultural differences to confuse potential explanations. Some writers on education in Appalachia have argued that cultural differences, ranging from speech to values, and the conflict which arises over such differences in the schools are the major factors producing "failures" in the schools (Best 1970; Branscome 1971; Clark 1974; DeYoung and Porter 1979; Jones 1971; Miller 1977; Whisnant 1973). Others have argued for the prominence of class as an explanatory variable (Walls 1976, 1978; Walls and Billings 1977; Mink and Barker 1968). Still other authors have argued that Appalachia is really not significantly different from rural America, particularly the rural South, thus suggesting that the educational problems in the area are more linked to rural/urban differences than anything else (Stephenson and Greer 1981).

The issue of Appalachian ethnicity is particularly controversial. Some authors have argued that Appalachians do not constitute a distinct ethnic group or subculture (Billings 1974; Fisher 1978; Miller 1978). Others have argued strongly that Appalachians do possess a distinctive ethnic culture (Jones 1971; Friedl 1978; Eller 1982; Whisnant 1980). The problem with the first position is that the authors have generally not dealt with the complexities of how ethnic boundaries are constituted, but have rather adapted a rather simple cultural view of ethnicity, while ignoring the structural and symbolic dimensions (see Keefe, Reck, and Reck 1983). The problem with the second view, as mentioned earlier, is that Appalachians tend to be poor

and rural, and thus the factors are confounded considerably in trying to understand the region. In addition, Appalachian people are predominantly of white Anglo-Saxon and Scotch-Irish extraction, descendents of early American pioneers which to many researchers makes them fundamentally "American" (J. Miller 1978b; Whisnant 1976).

One arena for beginning to unravel these issues is in the area of how these factors are related to formal school organization in a school setting where students differ significantly in the dimensions of Appalachian ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and rural/urban residence. The internal social organization of schools is one significant factor which influences educational attitudes and decisions of students (Brembeck 1973; Burnett 1964; Coleman 1961; Pettigrew and Pajones 1973). In fact, this internal factor has been found to be so significant in influencing the educational experience of students that some researchers have suggested the term "dropout" should be replaced with the term "pushout" (Wax 1976). While many researchers have found that Appalachian people have had less educational success than their non-Appalachian counterparts (Appalachian Consortium 1981; Parker 1970; Schrag 1972), the potential interaction of class and residence with Appalachian ethnicity in effecting the educational experience has not been investigated. This research contributes to that investigation.

Data Collection

A survey was administered to the 1450 high school students at a county-wide consolidated high school in southern Appalachia. Participation in the survey was voluntary and approximately 1100 (76% of total) usable surveys were completed. The survey consisted of three sections. The first section elicited background information designed to establish the generational depth of the student's family ties to Appalachia, the student's socioeconomic class,

and residence in the county. The second section elicited information concerning the student's past and present participation in formal school clubs, sports, and activities. The third section asked a variety of questions about employment, after-school work at home, and transportation to-and-from school.

Students at the high school are significantly diverse in terms of the factors of Appalachian ethnicity (operationally defined by generational depth in Appalachia), socioeconomic class, and rural/urban residence. A significant portion of the county population is comprised of individuals who have family ties of three generations or more to the Appalachian mountains. On the other hand, the county has a medium-sized state university and a substantial tourist industry, factors which have brought many people from around the country to reside in the county. The university and the tourist industry have also brought substantial numbers of upper-middle class and upper class individuals to the area. Yet, the county has many lower class families who make their living working in light industry, as small farmers, or as seasonal workers in the tourist industry. Finally, approximately two-thirds of the county population resides in rural areas, while one-third live in the main town in the county. The single county high school serves students from all of these diverse segments of the population. Students attend one of eight elementary schools in the county. Six of the elementary schools serve exclusively rural students, one serves a mixture, and the third serves almost exclusively students who reside in town.

Results

Formal participation in the high school was defined in terms of participation in school clubs, activities, and sports. The high school operates clubs during the school day, allocating one hour every other Friday morning to club meetings. Students who do not belong to any club remain in a study-

hall during this period. There are numerous clubs ranging from academic, service, game, vocational and religious clubs. Of the sampled student population, 81 percent belong to at least one club. This high percentage is due to both the diversity of clubs available and to the fact that they meet during regular school time. Activities include band, orchestra, chorus, student council, cheerleaders, and the newspaper/yearbook staff. Of the sampled student population, 29 percent participate in at least one of these activities. The sports program at the school is a typical one, with three boys' football teams (Freshmen, JV, and Varsity), boys' and girls' teams in basketball, baseball/softball, track, cross-country, golf, tennis, swimming, and a girls' volleyball team. A surprisingly high 37 percent of the student sample participate on an athletic team.

Participation and SES. Using father's education as the primary indicator of SES, data show that there is a significant positive relationship between father's education and participation in clubs, activities, and sports (see Table I). In all three types of formal participation, students whose fathers

Table I
Percent Participation By Father's Education

Father's Education		Clubs	Activities	Sports
Less than High School	(N=247)	68%	13%	22%
High School Graduate	(N=299)	80%	26%	32%
Some Post-Secondary Education	(N=485)	91%	40%	50%
Total	(N=1031)	81%	29%	37%

have less than a high school education are much less likely to participate than those whose fathers have either a high school degree or some form of post-secondary education. Although students whose fathers have less than a high school education made up 24 percent of the sample, they constituted 43

percent of the students who belonged to no club at all. The results using mother's education as an indicator of SES are similar.

Participation and Residence. Of the students sampled, approximately 25 percent reside within the city limits of the county's one main town. Although residence within the town is positively related to formal participation in the high school, the relationship is not notably strong (see Table II). However, when finer distinctions in residence are made, the relationship is stronger.

Table II
Percent Participation By Urban-Rural Residence

Residence		Clubs	Activities	Sports
Rural	(N=867)	80%	25%	35%
Urban	(N=290)	82%	38%	42%
Total	(N=1157)	81%	29%	37%

Participation is much lower for those students who reside in the areas of the county most remote from the town. This can be seen in Table III in which the student population has been divided into four categories of residence in school districts in the county. Area 1 is the most remote, Areas 2 and 3 are less remote, and Area 4 is that which serves the one town.

Table III
Percent Participation By Four Category Residence

Residence	Clubs	Activities	Sports
Area 1 (N=137; most rural)	67%	15%	31%
Area 2 (N=225)	79%	24%	32%
Area 3 (N=404)	82%	26%	36%
Area 4 (N=303; most urban)	87%	45%	44%
Total (N=1069)	81%	29%	37%

Thus, it is apparent that students in the most rural area of the county participate significantly less in all three categories of formal participation than do those students from the most urban area.

Participation and Ethnicity. For purposes of examining the possible relationship between Appalachian ethnicity and participation, the surveyed sample was divided into four groups: (1) native, in which the student and both of his/her parents were born in Appalachia; (2) return migrant, in which both parents were born in Appalachia, but the student wasn't; (3) mixed, in which one parent was born in Appalachia but the other parent wasn't and the student may or may not have been born in Appalachia; and (4) non-Appalachian in which neither parent was born in Appalachia and the student may or may not have been. Since major outside immigration into the area has taken place since 1960, most students who have parents born in the region also have grandparents born in Appalachia. Thus, the use of two generational depth in Appalachia to operationally define Appalachian ethnicity seems to be sufficient.

Data show that participation in the high school is related to ethnic background (see Table IV). Native Appalachians are less likely to participate

Table IV
Percent Participation By Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group		Clubs	Activities	Sports
Native	(N=522)	77%	23%	31%
Return Migrant	(N= 42)	79%	26%	31%
Mixture	(N=155)	89%	36%	37%
Non-Appalachian	(N=259)	88%	38%	51%
Total	(N=978)	81%	29%	37%

than any of the three other groups in clubs, activities, and sports. With only slight exception, there is a continuum of level of participation in all three areas from native to return migrant to mixture to non-Appalachian.

Discussion

All of the variables of SES, residence and ethnicity show a relationship to formal participation in the high school. Students of lower SES who reside in rural areas of the county and who have at least a two generational family depth to Appalachia are much less likely to participate in the formal structure of the high school. However, it is difficult to know which of these factors -- SES, residence, or ethnicity -- are most important. This is due to the fact that the three factors have a strong likelihood of occurring together.

Appalachian natives are most likely to live in rural areas and be of lower SES, while non-Appalachians tend to live in the urban area and be of higher SES. For example, in the most rural area of the county (Area 1 in Table III), 49 percent of the fathers of students in the sample dropped out before completing high school, while only 11 percent of the fathers of students in the most urban area (Area 4 in Table III) did so. Similarly, while only 21 percent of fathers in the most rural area have some form of post-secondary educational experience, 69 percent of the fathers in the urban area have such an experience. The comparative figures for mother's education are similar. In the same vein, almost 38 percent of the native Appalachian students' fathers have dropped out of high school, while only 4 percent of the fathers of non-Appalachian students have done so. In addition, over 85 percent of the families living in the most rural area are native Appalachian, while less than 40 percent of the residents of the most urban area are. These data are summarized in Table V. Thus, the factors of residence, SES, and ethnicity tend to occur together.

Table V
Comparison of Fathers' Education and Ethnicity By Area

Area	% of Fathers with Less than 12 Years Schooling	% Native Appalachians
Most Rural	49%	85%
Most Urban	11%	40%

In order to determine the relationship between these factors and their relative significance, multiple regression was utilized. A dependent variable -- total participation -- was created by combining the variable of club, activity, and sport participation. Thirteen independent variables, most of which are linked to ethnicity, residence, and SES, were included in the multiple regression. These variables were grade, sex, elementary school attended, student employment status, farm chores performed by student, mode of transportation home from school, native surname, town/rural residence, mother's occupation, father's occupation, mother's education, father's education, and ethnicity. Five of the variables accounted for 53 percent of the variance in total participation. These variables were father's occupation, mode of transportation from school, mother's occupation, elementary school attended, and grade. Two of these variables are SES factors, two are residence factors, and the fifth (grade) is simply an indication that lower-classmen participate less than upper-classmen.

Thus, it appears that residence and SES are more significant factors than ethnicity in determining participation. It is not that Appalachian ethnicity is unimportant. However, SES and residence obviously strongly mediate its influence. The students who are most likely to participate are non-Appalachian, town residents of middle or upper SES. Whatever ways that ethnicity influences participation, higher SES and town residence appear to be factors which overcome the liabilities of being Appalachian.

As teachers and administrators work to involve students in school activities in a more equitable manner, factors such as those explored in this research need to be considered. To the extent that participation in high school activities is a factor in successfully navigating through high school, policies must be developed which, as much as possible, maximize opportunities to participate regardless of different student characteristics.

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